



Alberta Initiative for School Improvement

AISI Handbook for Cycle 3

2006 – 2009

Education Partners Working Group

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Foreword

The Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AISI) is a bold approach to improving student learning by encouraging teachers, parents and the community to work collaboratively to introduce innovative projects that address local needs. Initiated in 1999, AISI provides targeted funding to school authorities to improve student learning and performance. More than \$400 million has been invested in this initiative to continuously improve student learning in Alberta. After two successful three-year cycles of the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (2000-2006), AISI is now in its third cycle, 2006-2009.

The purpose of this *AISI Handbook for Cycle 3* is to provide school authorities with the provincial and local requirements and processes for planning, funding, implementing, managing, evaluating, reporting and sharing school improvement projects.

The Alberta government, together with its partners, released the framework and administrative requirements for AISI in December 1999. The goal of AISI is to improve student learning and performance by fostering initiatives that reflect the unique needs and circumstances within school jurisdictions.

The first cycle of AISI ran from 2000 to 2003. School authorities (public, separate, Francophone, charter and private) initiated more than 800 projects to improve student learning that addressed local needs and circumstances. The results of these projects are on the AISI website at http://www.education.gov.ab.ca/k_12/special/aisi/

School improvement focuses on improving student learning through fostering enhanced strategies at the school, district, and government levels. Essential elements to promote school improvement include leadership, instructional practice, school climate, assessment and accountability, building capacity through professional development, student and parent engagement, and integration of effective practices.

As school improvement projects require substantial effort by all involved, this handbook has been designed as a reference to assist school authorities in planning and implementing sustainable AISI improvement projects.

The handbook has eight sections. The first provides a framework for the initiative. It includes the goal, principles, characteristics, research on how to improve student learning, criteria for AISI projects, and the intent for Cycle 3. Sections II to VI describe the requirements for developing AISI projects and reporting annual results. Section VII provides AISI contact information and Section VIII identifies the forms that are available on the AISI Extranet Site.

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- Alberta Education
- Alberta Home & School Councils' Association (AHSCA)
- Alberta School Boards Association (ASBA)
- Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA)
- Association of School Business Officials of Alberta (ASBOA)
- College of Alberta School Superintendents (CASS)
- University Faculties of Education

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1. Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AISI)

AISI Framework¹

Goal To improve student learning and performance by fostering initiatives that reflect the unique needs and circumstances within school jurisdictions.

Principles

1. Funding will flow to school jurisdictions and charter schools based upon approved proposals for improving student learning and performance.
2. Proposals can be multi-year (maximum of 3 years) but must have interim (at least annual) progress measurement targets. Continued funding depends upon evidence of success.
3. Funding consisting of an equal amount per registered FTE (Full Time Equivalent) student will be based upon the previous year's September 30th count.
4. The jurisdiction proposal needs to be part of the three-year planning and reporting process for purposes of the school jurisdiction's annual planning, reporting and accountability processes.
5. There will be an appropriate balance of local and provincial measures of performance that includes approved quantitative and/or qualitative measures.
6. Project results will be shared with Alberta school jurisdictions and others while Alberta Education will act as the "clearinghouse" on behalf of all partners.
- 7.² Given that collaboration is an essential element for school improvement, proposals should reflect support of those who will implement the projects and include meaningful involvement of the school community.

Key Considerations

- (1) Proposals should reflect insights from research and literature on improvement.
- (2) Each project proposal must include a budget. The sum of the school jurisdiction's projects cannot exceed the total school jurisdiction funding entitlement.
- (3) School jurisdictions may phase out projects and submit new proposals with provincial approval.
- (4) Funding shall not be paid as bonuses.
- (5) With reference to measures, the appropriate balance is 60% locally determined and 40% provincially determined.

¹ The AISI Partners established the goal, principles and key considerations in 1999. They are included in the *Framework for the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement* (AISI Education Partners Steering Committee, 1999). The entire framework is available on the website at http://www.education.gov.ab.ca/k_12/special/aisi/framework.asp

² This principle was key consideration 1 during cycles 1 and 2.

AISI Characteristics

AISI is a bold approach to supporting the improvement of student learning by encouraging teachers, parents, and the community to work collaboratively to introduce innovative and creative projects based upon local needs and circumstances. AISI is characterized by the following 11 attributes.

1. **Partnership** – AISI is a partnership among teachers, superintendents, trustees, business officials, universities, parents, and government. The AISI partnership is characterized by trust, collaboration, and teamwork among the education partners who share a commitment to improving education for Alberta students, who are the beneficiaries of this strong and diverse partnership. By working together, the partners continue to develop new relationships, strategies, and practices that provide long-term benefits to teaching and learning in our province.
2. **Catalyst** – AISI is a catalyst for change. The common goal, targeted funding, partnership, positive climate, and supportive infrastructure act in concert to achieve significant change in teaching and learning.
3. **Student focused** – AISI communicates a compelling commitment to school improvement that aligns with the long-term vision of Alberta Education. Students are active and engaged learners. AISI projects continue to strengthen the focus on student learning and accommodate the diverse learning needs of individual students and special populations.
4. **Flexibility** – School authorities choose strategies that enhance learning in the local context.
5. **Collaboration** – Collaboration is an essential element for school improvement. Projects are developed and implemented with meaningful involvement of the school community. The active engagement of teachers, staff and students, with the support of parents and partners is critical to project success.
6. **Culture of Continuous Improvement** – AISI promotes a culture of continuous improvement that is evident in schools and jurisdictions that have a clear alignment between school improvement goals and classroom practices. Continuous improvement is a shared responsibility. Schools operating as professional learning communities actively engage both teachers and students in learning. Professional development and ongoing administrative support are critical components in realizing continuous improvement within schools and school systems.

7. **Evidence-based Practice** – Evidence that educational practices benefit student learning and performance, through the collection, analysis and interpretation of data, is foundational to AISI. The use of multiple methods and data sources gives Albertans confidence in the results. As the body of evidence on successful practices grows, integration of these practices in new contexts will be the challenge and the promise of AISI.
8. **Research-based Interventions** – Solid research provides a reasonable expectation that improvement will occur. Implementation of effective instructional strategies is core to AISI projects. AISI is a vehicle for testing the efficacy of these interventions in the Alberta context.
9. **Inquiry and Reflection** – A clear focus on student learning is the foundation for inquiry and reflection. Inquiry and reflection lead to improved understanding and thoughtful changes to instructional practice. Analyzing strategies that worked and building on them leads to continuous improvement. Strategies that did not work as expected can provide important information about what needs to change and what might be successful.
10. **Building Capacity and Integrating Effective Practices** – Professional development continues to ensure that teachers and students benefit from the emerging knowledge, practices, and technologies that are being developed through AISI. Effective PD is planned, systemic and sustained. Promising practices, tools, products and processes developed and/or acquired through AISI will benefit Alberta's students in the future.
11. **Knowledge** – AISI contributes to the body of knowledge about teaching, learning, and instructional improvement. The AISI family shares this knowledge widely through conferences, reports, the Clearinghouse, and provincial networking sessions.

Improving Student Learning

There is a large body of evidence on how to improve student learning and schools. Relevant literature comes from a number of areas including psychology, sociology, and education. School improvement focuses on improving student learning through fostering enhanced strategies at the school, district, and government levels. Some evidence-based findings follow.

1. **Students learn best** when they are actively engaged in activities that are important and meaningful to them. Accomplishing a task independently constitutes learning. Brain research indicates that emotion is the gatekeeper to learning, intellectual functioning is greatly impacted by experience, and personal meaning is the key to memory.

2. **All levels of the education system must work together:** government, school authorities, and schools. Government must establish and align goals, policies, curricula, and accountability processes; school authorities must implement provincial directions and provide leadership and support to their schools; and schools must deliver effective instruction to their students.
3. **Effective schools** encompass effective leadership and teaching; a focus on learning; a positive school climate and culture; high expectations for both staff and students; emphasizing student responsibilities and rights; monitoring progress of students, classes, and the school; developing staff skills on site; and engaging parents in appropriate ways.
4. **Leadership** occurs at all levels and should be shared. Building a common vision, and a committed team, establishing partnerships, creating high-achieving learning environments, and leading and managing change are all aspects of successful leadership. Principals who concentrate on learning shift the focus from intentions to results. Schools organized as professional learning communities benefit both students and staff since the focus is on learning and continuous improvement of the processes that contribute to student learning.
5. **Teaching** that incorporates what is known about learning, successful grouping and organization to accommodate learning differences, and effective instructional practices is most effective. Teachers who build on students' prior knowledge and meaningful student contexts/cultures, work toward student self-direction and personal efficacy as educational goals, and integrate standards into the curriculum increase student learning. Instructional strategies that enhance student achievement for all students, in all subject areas, at all grade levels, include identifying similarities and differences, summarizing and note taking, and reinforcing effort and providing recognition.
6. **School climate** includes structure, standards, responsibility, recognition, support and commitment. Clear roles and responsibilities for both staff and students, focusing on continuous improvement, encouragement to solve problems, appreciation and recognition for a job well done, trust and mutual support, and a sense of pride in belonging all contribute to a positive school climate.
7. **Assessment** provides an opportunity for students to demonstrate what they know and can do, and for teachers to use the feedback to adjust their instructional practice. Collecting data from multiple sources and methods and analyzing and interpreting the results lead to decisions based on facts. **Accountability** is a means of providing a broad range of evidence to inform decision making.
8. **Professional development** must focus on improving student learning and build the school's collective capacity to achieve school-wide goals. Ongoing professional development keeps staff current and enhances teaching capacity in knowledge and skills in the subject(s) taught, pedagogical practices, and emerging technologies.

Professional development should include opportunities for other partners to gain knowledge to improve their learning.

9. **Parental engagement** in their children's lives and schooling is essential for successful learning. Parenting practices have important effects on children's social and cognitive outcomes. Children do better in school when parents monitor their behavior, are responsive to their needs, and encourage independence. Student learning and performance is improved when parents have the opportunity to participate in decision-making processes as members of the AISI partnership characterized by trust, collaboration and teamwork among the education partners.
10. **Successful change** occurs when participants perceive a need for change, create a common vision and goal, work together to achieve the goal, monitor progress, fine-tune practices based on evidence, and celebrate success. Aligning goals, strategies and measures results in information that is actionable.

Recommended references on pages 26-28 of the handbook provide further background information about improving student learning and schools.

Project Criteria

Criteria refer to accepted standards or rules for making decisions and judgments. AISI projects must meet these criteria, which are embedded in the *AISI Project Plan* and the *AISI Project Annual Report*.

1. **Improved Student Learning and Performance**

Projects must focus on improving student learning and performance. This refers specifically to student growth, achievement and improvement in areas involving knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behavior. Projects should focus on system priorities.

2. **Integration**

Integration refers to educators incorporating new practices, strategies, learnings, and key findings into their instructional repertoires. Ideally there will be transferability of educational practice and student learning to other classrooms / situations and school staff beyond project participants.

3. **Sustainability**

AISI projects are designed to have lasting impact on educational practices in schools. A plan outlining how to continue to benefit students and influence effective teacher practices in future years (beyond the AISI project) should be part of the project design. What is learned through research and project implementation should be systematically incorporated into schools and system-wide practices. Sustainability involves transference and institutionalization of practices as part of the culture of a school and/or jurisdiction.

4. Research Based

AISI projects should be based on system/school needs and use current research as a foundation for project design and direction. Research provides a solid base for what works in a variety of settings and with diverse students. Research syntheses, meta-analyses, and empirical studies are recommended as sources of evidence of what works.

5. Knowledge Dissemination

AISI teams are expected to share what they have learned. As educators try new approaches and learning/teaching strategies, they learn new knowledge and skills. Ways to disseminate new knowledge and practices include project documentation, workshops, conferences, events, promising practices for the AISI website, monographs, research briefs, and articles for the *School Improvement Scoop*, professional magazines, and journals. Effective communication strategies result in greater transference of new knowledge and longer term sustainability within schools, school authorities, and the province.

6. Professional Development

Effective professional development (PD) builds capacity and influences improved instructional delivery and educational programs. Professional development that works is focused on improving student learning and is typically ongoing, job-embedded, based on research, and integrated in multiple instructional settings. A comprehensive approach to PD is essential for successful implementation of AISI goals.

7. Innovation

AISI provides targeted funds to try new things. School authorities are encouraged to try new approaches to address local student needs. Innovation is defined broadly to include research-based strategies that have not been used before in the school authority or its schools. Flexibility, risk taking, and thinking "outside the box" are encouraged.

8. School Community Support

AISI project stakeholders (staff, parents, school councils, and community partners) need to be aware of and have meaningful roles and involvement in project initiation, development, implementation, celebration, and institutionalization.

9. Project Design

AISI projects have a systematic, well defined, and clearly articulated design. A comprehensive plan meets all project criteria: clearly stated purpose, goals, and student learning outcomes; background information; research base; support and involvement of key stakeholders; measures; instructional and communication strategies; and staffing and budget details.

10. Student Assessment

AISI projects provide annual evidence of student learning and performance. They use both quantitative and qualitative measures that are appropriate to intended student outcomes. Assessment involves describing, collecting, recording, scoring, and interpreting information about a student's (or one's own) learning. Assessment techniques include tests, exhibits, interviews, surveys, performance rubrics, observation, portfolios, etc.

Student assessment³ can take different forms:

- 10.1 *Assessment of Learning* – Assessments and practices designed to collect information about learning to make judgments about student performance at the end of a period of instruction that is shared with those outside the classroom (also called summative assessment).
- 10.2 *Assessment for Learning* – Assessment experiences that result in an ongoing exchange of information between students and teachers about student progress toward clearly specified learner outcomes (also called diagnostic or formative assessment). Outcomes suggest further steps for teaching and learning.

AISI Cycle 3 – Building on Success

The Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AISI) has successfully completed two full cycles of implementation. Initiated in 1999, AISI provides targeted funding to all Alberta school authorities to improve student learning and performance. The AISI Education Partners⁴ developed the goal, principles, and processes that have guided the initiative over the past six years.

Cycle 1 established a **foundation** of trust between government and education stakeholders, and created a model for collaboration that has been used in other government initiatives. It also established accountability measures and criteria to provide evidence that the initiative is working and set the stage for continuous improvement. Cycle 1 ran from 2000 to 2003 and involved 828 AISI projects.

Cycle 2 consolidated emerging knowledge and synthesized what works. It built on the enthusiasm and commitment of the first cycle and expanded AISI's sphere of influence to more teachers and students in Alberta. Cycle 2 can be characterized by **integration and sustainability** of effective practices such as promising instructional interventions, professional development, and administration. The cycle ran from 2003 to 2006 and involved 450 projects.

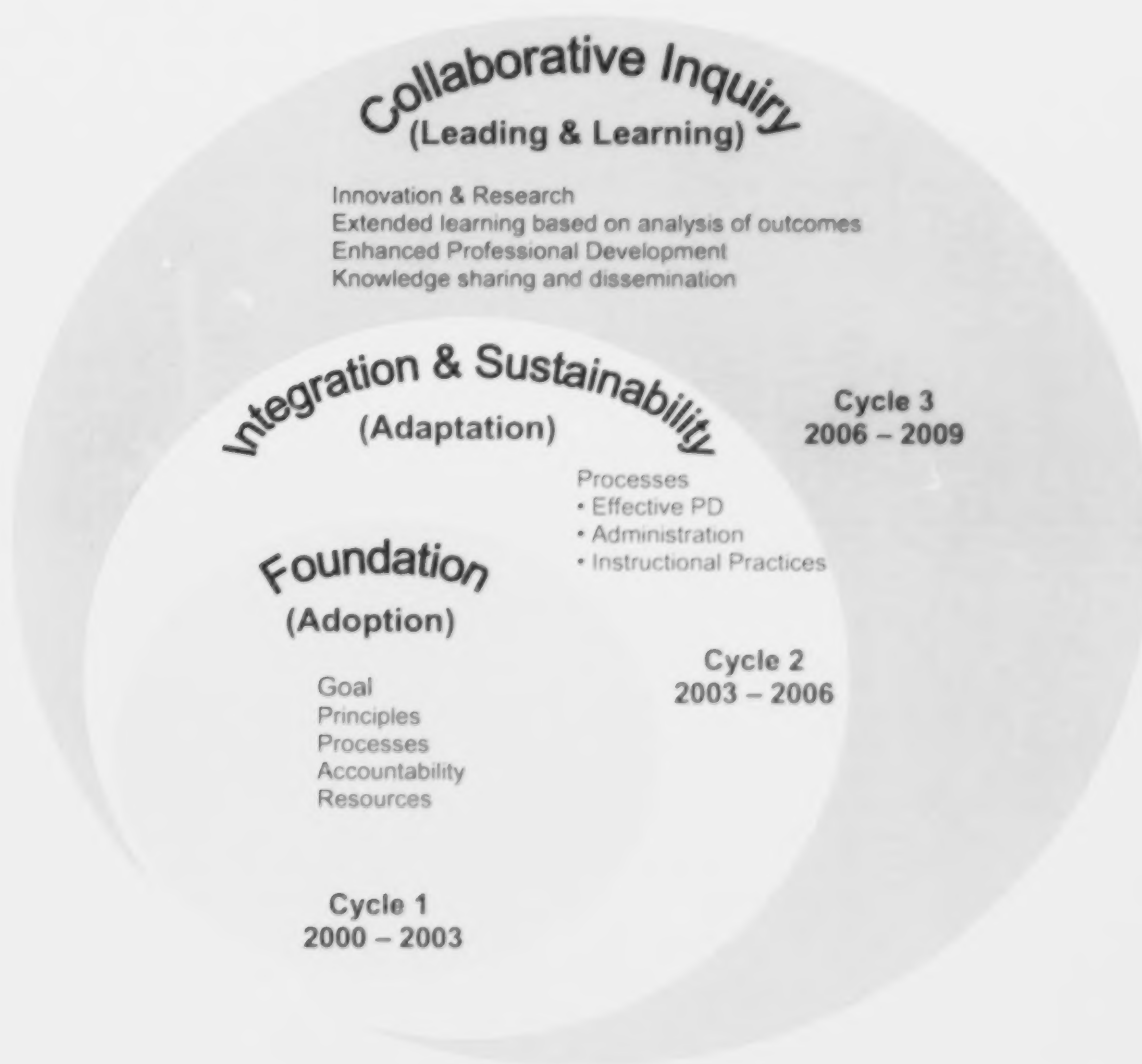
³ A third type is *Assessment as Learning* – A process in which a student engages in systematic review of his/her performance for the purpose of improving future performance. The student then adjusts performance according to established standards or criteria. Reflection, self-evaluation, and metacognition are related terms. See, for example, Earl (2003).

⁴ Alberta Education, Alberta Home and School Councils' Association (AHSCA), Alberta School Boards Association (ASBA), Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA), Association of School Business Officials of Alberta (ASBOA), College of Alberta School Superintendents (CASS), University Faculties of Education.

Cycle 3 will continue to build on the accomplishments of the first two cycles. Characterized by **collaborative inquiry**, it will emphasize innovation and research, extend what has been learned based on in-depth analysis of project outcomes, enhance professional practice, and focus professional development on curricular areas. Cycle 3 will pursue further knowledge sharing and dissemination. It will run from 2006 to 2009.

Figure 1 summarizes the evolution of AISI over three cycles of continuously improving processes to meet the program's goal – improved student learning and performance.

Figure 1: Improving Student Learning and Performance



II. Funding

1. Eligibility

- 1.1 AISI funding is available to all Alberta school authorities (public, separate, francophone, charter and private schools) and includes the two Lloydminster school divisions (Alberta Regulation 51/97).
- 1.2 School authorities may utilize AISI funding for school improvement projects for pre-school children and ECS to grade 12 students.

2. Parameters, Categories & Scope

- 2.1 Annual funding will be provided to school authorities for each of the school years 2006 to 2009. \$70 million was provided in 2005-2006; approximately \$71 million will be provided in 2006-2007.
- 2.2 The funding entitlement to each eligible school authority for a school year is based upon the previous year's September 30th registered student count (ECS students counted as 0.5 FTE) times the per-student rate. The annual per-student rate is determined by dividing the total available funding for the year by the total "eligible" provincial enrolment count.
- 2.3 Funding for the 2005-2006 school year was \$125 per registered student for grades 1-12 (\$62.5 for ECS) in public authorities and \$75 (\$62.5 for ECS) in private authorities. Funding for the 2006-2007 school year will be \$128 per registered FTE student for ECS to grade 12 (ECS is 0.5 FTE) in public authorities and \$77 (\$64) in private authorities.

3. Approval

- 3.1 Funding for the first year of projects is based upon approval of project applications by the School Improvement Branch.
- 3.2 Funding for subsequent school years for multi-year projects is dependent upon school authorities providing evidence of project success to Alberta Education at the completion of a school year.
- 3.3 Funding flows to school authorities beginning in September of each school year.
- 3.4 School authorities may decide to invest additional resources into AISI improvement projects over and above their AISI allocation.

4. Allocation Decisions

- 4.1 The method of allocating AISI funds within a school authority and deciding upon projects to submit for provincial approval is a local decision. Decisions must be made on priorities to meet local needs and circumstances. These needs and circumstances could include:
- district-wide priorities and/or needs (e.g., early literacy, numeracy)
 - grade/subject specific needs (e.g., elementary reading, junior high math, high school completion)
 - school-specific needs (e.g., high needs students)
 - local community needs (e.g., pre-ECS readiness programs for at-risk children)
 - a combination of the above
- 4.2 Authorities can partner with other school authorities to “pool” all or some of their AISI funding. For example:
- Authorities A and B might share a reading specialist whose salary is paid by A and travel and materials by B (or A and B could share costs 50-50).
 - School X in School Authority A could arrange for School Y in Authority B to use its science facilities in exchange for use of Y’s fine arts facilities.
 - Schools in adjacent authorities could provide joint professional development for their math teachers.
- 4.3 Authorities can combine their AISI funds with funds from other sources (internal or external) in order to implement larger or more comprehensive projects.
- 4.4 A school authority may submit one or more individual projects. However, the total funding required cannot exceed the total funding amount available to the authority for the given school year based upon the number of registered students times the AISI per-student rate.
- 4.5 AISI funds may be used for all appropriate costs associated with the school improvement project, subject to provincial approval of the projects. The guidelines for budgets are a minimum of 15% for professional development, approximately 5% for project management and administration, and no more than 10% of AISI funding be expended on equipment or other capital.
- 4.6 Subject to the following considerations, authorities have a high degree of autonomy and flexibility in designing improvement projects and in allocating resources in order to foster school improvement:
- funding shall not be paid as bonuses to staff
 - per-capita allocations to schools are not allowed

- 4.7 Authorities are responsible to account for budgets and actual expenditures and to have management systems, processes and procedures in place that meet generally acceptable accounting principles and practices.

5. Continuation

- 5.1 Alberta Education will approve funding for multi-year projects to flow in the second and third years based upon demonstrated evidence of success. Funding will not continue in subsequent years for multi-year projects if the professional judgment of Alberta Education and school authority staff indicates the project was unsuccessful.

In the case of discontinuing an unsuccessful project, the funds may be transferred to other existing projects or may be used for a new project once approved by Alberta Education.

- 5.2 Funding for project applications submitted and/or approved after September 1 will commence in the month following approval and may include "retroactive" funding if that was included in the project application budget and Alberta Education decision process.

III. Project Planning & Proposal Preparation

AISI projects must:

- focus on improving student learning and performance (e.g., % of students completing high school)
- support the improvement of student learning by encouraging teachers, parents and other education partners to work collaboratively to introduce innovative and creative initiatives based upon local needs and circumstances
- result in enhancements to regular instructional practices
- result in learnings that can be integrated and disseminated after project completion

1. School authorities develop school improvement projects from identified needs.
2. Project applications reflect insights from current research and literature on school improvement. Alberta university partners have compiled literature synopses related to project themes. These synopses are posted on the AISI Clearinghouse.
3. Every school authority develops its own policies, criteria, priorities, and selection processes for AISI projects within its own philosophy and preferences. (Note: Some of the considerations are identified in Sections III and IV of this handbook).

4. As collaboration is an essential element for school improvement, project applications must reflect support of those who will implement the projects and include meaningful involvement of the school community. In addition to students, staff and families, school community includes school councils and agencies providing school services that affect the ability of children to be successful learners.
5. Each project application must include a budget. The sum of the school authority's request submitted to Alberta Education for funding approval cannot exceed the total school authority AISI funding entitlement. All designated AISI funds must be expended on AISI projects.
6. School authorities must provide professional development as it is essential to the school improvement process.
7. The requirement to reflect school improvement research as foundational to project development and implementation ensures there is a strong possibility for success.
8. There is a need for "bottom-up" and "top-down" processes including consultation and commitment, and the need for overall authority planning and decision-making on priorities. In order to be successful, projects must be based on support at the school and community level. At the same time, the school authority must make the final decision about the overall direction and allocation of resources, in light of local context and identified needs of its school authority.
9. The School Improvement Branch of Alberta Education must receive submissions for new projects no later than April 30th of each year; years 2 and 3 of multi-year projects need not be resubmitted for approval.
10. AISI projects are to be linked to the school authority's three-year planning and reporting processes. See the *Guide for Education Planning and Results Reporting 2006-2009* (Alberta Education, 2006).

Project Requirements

Each project must include information on the following requirements:

Section A – Project Overview

- A1 Project parameters
- A2 Project description
- A3 School community involvement
- A4 Research
- A5 Improvement goals

Section B – Detailed project Plan

- B1 Project measures
- B2 Key strategies and processes
 - B2a Instructional strategies
 - B2b Student assessment
 - B2c Project management
 - B2d Professional development
 - B2e Parental involvement and communication
- B3 Evaluation process
- B4 Integration and sustainability
- B5 Knowledge dissemination and sharing
- B6 Staffing requirements
- B7 Budget and financial report
- B8 Project expense schedule
- B9 Attachment (optional)⁵
- B10 Project contacts
- B11 Superintendent certification

Section A – Project Overview

A1 Project Parameters

1. Each school authority will establish AISI projects that address priorities determined in consultation with its communities. Proposals should reflect the support of those who will implement the projects and should involve the school community, with final decisions being made by the school authority in consideration of their overall direction and needs.

⁵ Supplementary materials may be attached. They are not required.

2. Projects may have single or multi-year timeframes. A three-year timeframe is preferable for most projects in order to develop meaningful and sustainable improvement in student learning.

A2 Project Description

There must be a brief description of the project. This description must describe how this project is different from AISI projects carried out by the school authority in the first (2000-2003) and second (2003-2006) cycles of AISI. These differences may include improvement goals, key strategies, new schools, new grades, new subjects, etc.

A3 School Community Involvement

1. There must be meaningful involvement of the school community, including identification of who participated in the consultation process (e.g., administrators, parents, principals, school council, students, teachers).
2. The proposal must describe the participants' involvement.
3. As collaboration is an essential element for school improvement, project applications must reflect support of those who will implement the projects and include meaningful involvement of the school community. In addition to students, staff and families, school community includes school councils and agencies providing school services that affect the ability of children to be successful learners.
4. There is a need for "bottom-up" and "top-down" processes including consultation and commitment, and the need for overall authority planning and decision-making on priorities. In order to be successful, projects must be based on support at the school and community level. At the same time, the school authority must make the final decision about the overall direction and allocation of resources, in light of local context and identified needs of its school authority.

A4 Research

1. Project applications reflect insights from current research on school improvement. Alberta university partners have compiled literature synopses related to project themes as well as completed AISI project research reviews. These synopses and reports are posted on the AISI Clearinghouse.
2. Alberta Education has established an AISI website to assist schools in identifying improvement research. School authorities and the university Faculties of Education have all contributed to the information base. The website is located at http://www.education.gov.ab.ca/k_12/special/aisi/

3. The requirement to reflect school improvement research as foundational to project development and implementation ensures there is a strong possibility for success.

A5 Improvement Goals

AISI projects are to be linked to the school authority's three-year planning and reporting processes. See the *Guide for Education Planning and Results Reporting 2006-2009* (Alberta Education, 2006). Alberta Education updates this guide annually.

1. Each project must describe how its AISI goals and priority areas for improvement are related to the school authority's three-Year Education Plan.
2. Proposals must indicate the alignment among the goals, strategies, and measures. For example:
 - **Goal** – to improve student reading in grades 1-3
 - **Strategies** – balanced literacy and picture-word inductive model
 - **Measures** – Gates MacGinitie reading test for grades 1 and 2, grade 3 English language arts provincial achievement test, parent survey

See Appendix 1 for further elaboration.

Section B Detailed Project Plan

1. Projects must plan for integrating effective practices after formal completion. Incorporating effective practices is essential in sustaining improved learning.
2. Local planning, implementation, and ongoing support and assessment are critical to the success of each school improvement project. Sound initiatives can fail during implementation because they are taken for granted and not sufficiently supported. The success of a school improvement project depends on appropriate involvement of education partners in the design and implementation of the project, and ongoing support, both at the school and district levels.
3. Each project should have an implementation strategy with sufficient dedicated resources to adequately support the project.

B1 Project Measures

1. Project strategies and measures must be aligned with improvement goals. The types of measures used should be determined by the nature of each improvement project, its expected outcome and the need to provide evidence of improvement. In other words, the measures must be appropriate to the nature of the improvement sought and should not "drive" the project design. Types of measures include:

	Quantitative	Qualitative
Local	• Attendance • Program participation • Local jurisdiction tests • Standardized tests • <i>Others to be identified / developed during AISI project development</i>	• Observation • Portfolios • Case studies • Interviews • Surveys (students, parents, teachers, public) • <i>Others to be identified / developed during AISI project development</i>
Provincial	• Provincial achievement tests (grades 3, 6, 9) • Participation rates including off-campus programs • High school completion rates • Diploma exams (grade 12)	• Provincial surveys (students, parents, public)

2. AISI measures should focus on outcomes (i.e., student performance).
3. The fundamental purpose of measurement is to demonstrate or provide evidence of success for a project based on its impact on student learning. Measures for a project must be appropriate to the focus of each improvement project.
4. Projects must have an appropriate balance of local and provincial measures of performance that includes approved quantitative and/or qualitative measures.
 - All measures proposed by a school authority will be analyzed during the School Improvement Branch review and approval process. Adjustments will be made in collaboration with the school authority.

- The approved local and provincial measures will be used to establish the evidence of success in order to determine if funding is to continue into year two and/or year three of multi-year projects.
 - Use of provincial achievement tests, diploma exams, participation rates and high school completion rates should be made where appropriate and reasonable.
5. Since each AISI project reflects the unique needs and circumstances within the school authority, there is no minimum or maximum number of measures. The number of measures should be sufficient to demonstrate "evidence of success" in terms of interim (progress) and final outcomes.
 6. School authorities should exercise professional judgment to determine the following for each project:
 - the baseline used to determine improvement (a three-year average is recommended)
 - degree of targeted improvement should be realistic and attainable
 7. The types of measures used by school authorities should be determined by the nature of the performance, achievement, or indicators necessary to provide evidence of improvement. In other words, the measures must be appropriate to the nature of the improvement sought.
 - The school authority proposes appropriate provincial and local measures as indicators of evidence of success for the project as part of the project application.
 - Alberta Education approves local measures.
 - Authorities are encouraged to develop measures that reflect the unique nature of both their local circumstances and improvement projects.
 8. Alberta Education encourages the use of readily available provincial measures.

Quantitative measures of student learning include the grades 3, 6, and 9 provincial achievement tests, the grade 12 diploma examinations, and others such as participation rates for the achievement tests and diploma exams, and high school completion rates, which are generated from provincial administrative data.

Qualitative measures to support projects could include the provincial surveys for students in grades 4, 7 and 10, their parents and teachers. These instruments are available on Alberta Education's website at http://www.education.gov.ab.ca/k_12/special/aisi/

9. Other qualitative measures can be found in the education literature and from various researchers and districts currently using qualitative measures. Authorities will likely develop more qualitative measures for their own AISI projects. These will then be shared across the province.
10. **Evidence of success** is the net sum professional judgment of provincial and local staff of the amount of movement toward the set improvement target(s) based upon an analysis of all evaluative information on the progress of the project. Multiple data sources and methods are encouraged. A major consideration is that more than one year may be required to achieve success. An apparent decline in a single year may not be a reflection of lack of success but would need to be investigated further by the AISI team.

A common baseline for comparison is the three-year average results for prior performance of similar groups of students. Comparisons on selected measures with similar groups who have not been involved with the program may also be used. In addition to, or in the absence of comparisons, professional judgments, particularly those made by independent observers, may be useful.

11. An authority may withdraw a project at any time if it discerns that a project is not meeting with apparent success and submit a new project application with the approval of Alberta Education.

B2 Key Strategies and Processes

B2a Instructional Strategies

Projects must identify the instructional strategies to be used to improve student learning. For example, they might use identifying similarities and differences⁶, cooperative learning, nonlinguistic representations, etc.

B2b Student Assessment

AISI projects must provide annual evidence of student learning and performance. Assessment involves describing, collecting, recording, scoring, and interpreting information about a student's (or one's own) learning. Assessment techniques include tests, exhibits, interviews, surveys, performance rubrics, observation, portfolios, etc. In addition to summative assessments (year-end assessments), projects should include an ongoing exchange of information between students and teachers about student progress toward clearly specified learner outcomes (also called diagnostic or formative assessment). See the definitions of assessment *for* and *of* learning in Section I (p. 7).

⁶ See Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock (2001) for elaboration of these and other strategies. The average effect sizes for identifying similarities and differences is 1.61, for cooperative learning .73, and for nonlinguistic representations .75.

B2c Project Management

Projects must be managed so they can succeed. This requires some type of support such as a project coordinator, consultant, or lead teacher. Approximately 5% of project funds should be spent on project management and support. The proposal should indicate who will be responsible for management, and the proportion of his/her time that will be invested in this activity.

B2d Professional Development

School authorities must provide professional development as it is essential to the school improvement process.

- Professional development that works is focused on improving student learning and is typically ongoing, job-embedded, based on research, and integrated in multiple instructional settings.
- A comprehensive approach to professional development is essential for successful implementation of AISI goals. See *A Guide to Comprehensive Professional Development Planning* for ideas.

B2e Parental Involvement and Communication

There must be meaningful involvement of parents in planning the proposal. Parental involvement can take many forms, but has been found to be very successful in helping students succeed. See also A3.

B3 Evaluation Process

Evidence is more compelling if it is corroborated through multiple sources. Projects describe the evaluation methods and data sources they'll use to determine the success of their project. Multiple methods (e.g., student assessment, surveys), data sources (students, parents, teachers), and levels (e.g., grades 1, 2, 3, etc.) are recommended.

B4 Integration and Sustainability

1. See the definitions on integration and sustainability on page 5.
2. Projects must indicate how educators will integrate what is learned: how they incorporate new practices, strategies, learnings, and key findings into their instructional repertoires.
3. AISI projects are designed to have lasting impact on educational practices in schools. Proposals must indicate how the school authority plans to continue to benefit students and influence effective teacher practices in future years (beyond the AISI project).

B5 Knowledge Dissemination and Sharing

Projects must identify how what has been learned will be shared. Ways to disseminate new knowledge and practices include project documentation, workshops, events, conferences, promising practices for the AISI website, monographs, research briefs, and articles for the *School Improvement Scoop*, professional magazines, and journals.

B6 Staffing Requirements

Projects must identify the people who will be involved. Staff can include teachers and AISI coordinators, other professionals, teaching assistants, administrative and support staff.

B7 Budget and Financial Report

Each project application must include a budget. The sum of the school authority's request submitted to Alberta Education for funding approval cannot exceed the total school authority AISI funding entitlement. All designated AISI funds must be expended on AISI projects. If a school authority decides to fund a project beyond the provincial AISI funding, this fact should be specified in the submission.

It is recognized that school improvement is not a "quick fix" activity, but rather an ongoing process that requires collaboration, commitment, and sustained support. AISI's requirements of budgeting, reporting and accountability are an attempt to promote long-term efficiency and effectiveness, not short-term change.

B8 Project Expense Schedule

AISI funds may be used for all appropriate costs associated with the school improvement project, subject to provincial approval of the projects. The guidelines for budgets are:

- a minimum of 15% for professional development
- approximately 5% for project management and administration
- no more than 10% of AISI funding should be expended on equipment or other capital

B9 Attachment (Optional)

Supplementary materials that may be helpful in understanding the project may be attached in excel spreadsheets and word format.

B10 Project Contacts

Key project contacts who can provide additional information about the project should be included.

B11 Superintendent Certification

The **AISI Project Proposal** for new projects is due by April 30th of each year. The Superintendent/CEO shall certify that the project:

1. addresses an identified need
2. addresses goals, strategies, schools, grades, etc. that are different from those addressed in Cycles 1 (2000-2003) and 2 (2003-2006)
3. has the meaningful involvement of the school community, including school councils
4. has the support of those who will implement it
5. has a research base
6. has processes in place for ongoing monitoring during the cycle
7. identifies provincial and/or local (and quantitative and qualitative) measures that appear reasonable
8. has improvement targets that are achievable
9. identifies strategies that have a reasonable chance of achieving the improvement goals and targets
10. has an implementation plan outlining a timeline for key steps
11. includes a workable plan for knowledge dissemination and sharing
12. identifies appropriate evaluation methods

As part of the accountability process, the Superintendent/CEO must certify that the project meets requirements. See Section IV.

IV. Review & Approval of Project Application Submissions

1. Alberta Education's School Improvement Branch (SIB) is responsible for reviewing and approving project application submissions from school authorities
2. SIB undertakes its provincial role and responsibilities within a philosophy of openness, collaboration, trust, involvement, simplicity and the framework established by the AISI Education Partners Steering Committee.
3. SIB provides project approval criteria to school authorities.
4. SIB seeks clarification from school authorities and requests revisions as necessary.
5. SIB makes a decision on project approval and notifies the school authority through the AISI extranet system.
6. If there are significant areas of concern with a project, Alberta Education works to resolve the outstanding issue(s) by consulting with the school authority and clearly identifying the required revisions.

7. If a project application is rejected, the school authority may request Alberta Education reviewers to provide a second review.

V. Reporting Requirements

1. Reporting

- 1.1 Evidence of success is the net sum professional judgment of provincial and local staff of the amount of movement toward the set improvement target(s) based upon an analysis of all evaluative information on the progress of the project. Multiple data sources and methods are encouraged. A major consideration is that more than one year may be required to achieve success. An apparent decline in a single year may not be a reflection of lack of success but would need to be investigated further by the AISI team.
- 1.2 Each school authority must report AISI funding in the revenue section of the annual Budget Report and in the revenue and expenditure section of the Audited Financial Statements.
- 1.3 An AISI Project Annual Report (APAR) shall be submitted by October 15 of each year. The Superintendent/CEO shall certify that: "The information provided in this AISI Project Annual Report (APAR) is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, accurate, reliable and valid. I believe that all AISI requirements have been met." The school authority has the documentation and systems that support the reported information. Parents are involved as partners from inception to completion of the project and are aware of the progress and results.
- 1.4 The following reporting requirements exist.

Financial Reports A line item in: • Annual Budget Report • Audited Financial Statements	April 30 November 30
Project Reports AISI Project Annual Report (APAR) AISI Project Final Report (APFR)	October 15
Annual Education Results Report (AERR)	November 30

2. Ongoing, Annual, and Summative Evaluation

- 2.1 School authorities decide upon their ongoing, annual and summative measurement and evaluation policies and processes as part of their planning, management, and assessment practices.
- 2.2 School authorities should make provision for ongoing evaluation on a natural cycle (e.g., quarterly or other regular basis decided by the school authority) comparing the baseline and targets (both interim and final outcome) to actual progress.
- 2.3 The *Annual Education Results Report* (AERR), due by November 30, requires a web-link to the authority's annual report for each AISI project.
- 2.4 Evaluation practices should meet professional standards and be done in accordance with the targets, measures and evidence of success described in Sections III and IV of this handbook.

3. Clearinghouse, Sharing and Promising Practices

- 3.1 Alberta Education has established, with its partners, the process and mechanism for a provincial electronic AISI Clearinghouse (on its website) that includes information such as project descriptions, findings, results, conclusions and promising practices.
- 3.2 Each school authority annually provides information on its AISI projects such as findings, results, conclusions and promising practices to the provincial AISI Clearinghouse so that successes and non-successes can be shared.
- 3.3 The AISI Education Partner Steering Committee coordinates and/or organizes various sharing venues and mechanisms such as partners' meetings and conferences/conventions including:
 - Teachers' Conventions
 - ASBA Annual General Meetings
 - AHSCA Parent Conference/Annual General Meeting
 - AISI Conference

VI. Annual Timeline

Provincial	Local	Date
Ministerial announcement that Cycle 3 funding confirmed		
AISI updates by SIB to school authorities relating to Cycle 3		March to April
Target date for new projects		April 30
Review and approval of new project applications		May to September
	Planning project implementation	May to June
	Project implementation begins	August to September
	Submit APAR/APFR	October 15
SIB reviews and approves APARs/APFRs		October to December
Scheduled regional workshops		Fall/Spring
	Development of local project guidelines, priorities, etc.	February to April
	Needs assessment, literature reviews, community consultation	
	Project planning	
	Local selection of projects and project application preparation	
	Submission of AERR which includes link to AISI report	November 30
Preparation of provincial report		December to March
Funding payments (monthly) to school authorities for approved projects	Ongoing project implementation	September to August
SIB visitations		Spring
CYCLE REPEATS		

Empty cells indicate no activity.

VII. Alberta Education Contacts and Assistance

For assistance contact the School Improvement Branch of Alberta Education.

Contact	Phone	Fax
SIB Office	(780) 427-3160	(780) 415-2481
Address:	School Improvement Branch 12 th Floor, 44 Capital Boulevard 10044 – 108 Street Edmonton, Alberta T5J 5E6	

VIII. Forms

1. AISI Project Proposal/Plan
2. AISI Project Annual Report (APAR)
3. AISI Project Final Report (APFR)

Current word template versions of these forms are maintained in the AISI Extranet Site: <https://phoenix.edc.gov.ab.ca/login/default.asp>

Recommended Reading

AISI website: http://www.education.gov.ab.ca/k_12/special/aisi/

AISI Home	AISI Clearinghouse Search	Documents/ Publications	Workshops & Conferences
What is AISI AISI Framework AISI Admin Handbook What's New/Tips & Tools Contacts	Cycle 2 Project Summaries Promising Practices Products & Tools Cycle 1 Project Summaries & Reports Related Research – Searchable Database Access Detailed Project Information	Newsletters Literature Synopses What We Have Learned Annual Reports Supporting Documents	Online Registrations PD Workshop Handouts Past AISI Conferences

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Appendix: Aligning Goals, Strategies and Measures

Goal	Strategies	Measures	Baseline	Target	Actual	Number
To improve individual student reading level in grade 1, 2, and 3 to 82% or greater, in 2004 Outcome All students at grade 3 will read at or above grade level	1. Balanced Literacy Model 2. Picture-word inductive model	Gates-MacGinitie reading test for grade 1	80% of grade 1 students are $\geq$ grade level Based on three-year average 2001-2003 of grade 1 students in school.	82%	83% Exceeded target; strategies worked as expected.	50
The table illustrates how goals, strategies, outcomes and measures are aligned. - The goal of improving reading is to be achieved by using two strategies. - The Gates-MacGinitie reading tests are used for students in grades 1 and 2 while the English language arts PAT reading subtest is used at grade 3. - Baselines are three-year averages for the achievement measures; as the parent survey is new, the first-year actual will serve as the baseline. - Improvement targets have been set at 2% over the baseline. - Reading increased for grades 1 and 3, but did not meet the target for grade 2. Grade 2 teachers will increase the amount of reading practice next year. 85% of the parents of grades 1 to 3 students responded to the survey about their child's reading.		Gates-MacGinitie reading test for grade 2	75% of grade 2 students are $\geq$ grade level Based on three-year average 2001-2003 of grade 2 students in school.	77%	76% Did not meet target. Will increase the amount of reading practice next year.	48
		Grade 3 ELA PAT reading subtest	78% of grade 3 students are $\geq$ the Acceptable Standard. Based on three-year average 2001-2003 of grade 3 students in school.	80%	81% Exceeded target.	54
		Parent survey (15-item survey of child's reading performance, frequency, and enjoyment)	TBD in first year of project.	90%	90% Overall 90% of parents reported their child was reading better, more often, and enjoyed reading.	128
						Response rate of 85% (128/150)

